The LIAUG Lighthouse

The newsletter of the Long Island Atari User Group

DECEMBER 1989
VOLUME 5 NO. 12

HAPPY HOLIDAYS



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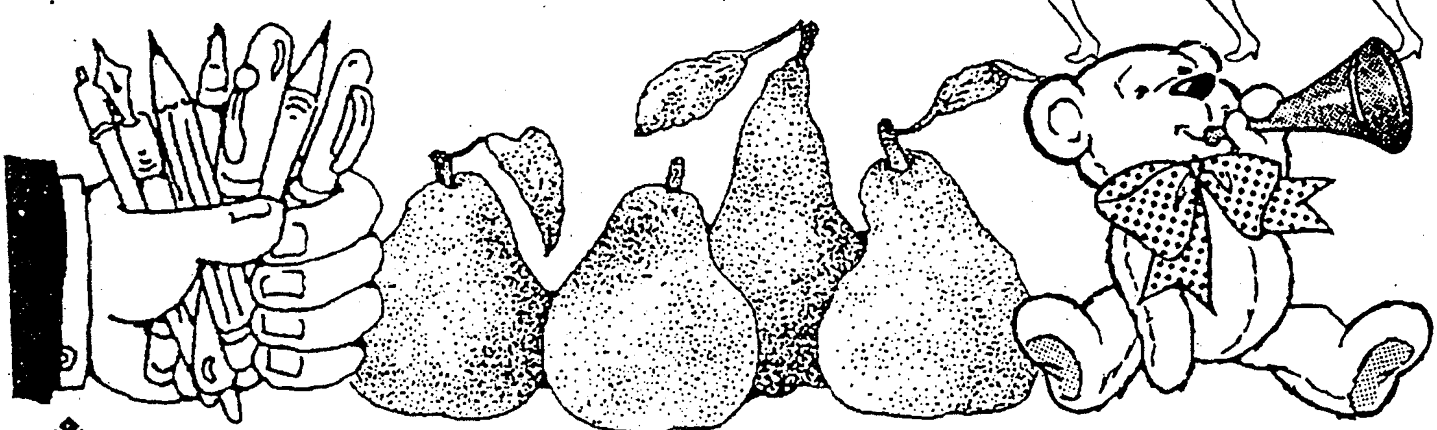
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Business Card	$ 5.00
114 Page	10.00
112 Page	20.00
Full Page	30.00

Rates are per issue - camera ready copy only Consecutive ads placed at the same time receive a 10% discount per issue with a 30% maximum. Send ads to our regular mailing address

Directions to the library: Fmm the Long island Expressway: Take exit 58 North (Old Nichols Road). continue north for appmximately two miles and make a left (west) turn onto Smithtown Blvd. Continue west for 1 112 miles to the Nesconset Plaza on the right hand side of the road. The library is located in the west end of the plaza.

From The Northern State Parkway: Take the Northern to the end where it continues east as Veterans Memorial/Nesconset Highway (routes 3471454). Go east approximately two miles and take the left fork (347). Continue for another three miles to Terry Road. Make a right turn onto Teny Road and take the left fork (approximately 314 mile) onto Smithtown Blvd. The library will be in the Nesconset Plaza on the left hand side approximately one mile from the fork. Meetings are open to all those interested at no charge. The meetings begin at 1290 p.m. in the library 's community room and end at 490 p.m.

Current LIAUG Officers

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Librarian 16 bit	Harvey Schoen
BBS Sysop	Patrick J. Mulvey
Club Correspondent	Terrence Madden
Int'l correspondent	Horst DeWitz
Newsletter Editor	Harvey Schoen
8 Bit Program Manager	Pat Mulvey
16 Bit Program Manager	Terrence Madden

Club Meetings

The Long Island Atari User Group Meets once a month at the Nesconset branch of the Smithtown Library. Membership dues are $20 per year and ent:itles you to receive the newsletter.

The newsletter is currently being produced on a 520ST with lmbyte memory and a 20mbyte hard drive. Software is Timeworks Desktop Publisher.

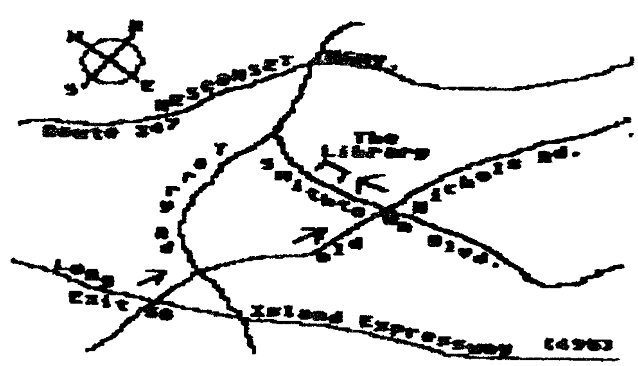
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Our address is:

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Our BBS number is: (516) 221-8462

If no answer call: (516) 221-2964 and leave a message



DeskTop Publishing on a 130XE

G. L. Ray (TACE)

The newest and **biggest** application for the personal computer has to be desktop publishing. But, as of yet, the **8bit** Atari has no **versatile,** user-friendly package that will create the type of product I expect from a DTP program.

Sure, there is Newsroom and News Station and Typesetter. I have all of these programs. but they either are very limited in features. user friendliness or in print quality. My solution, therefore, was to combine features of several programs to achieve the results I wanted.

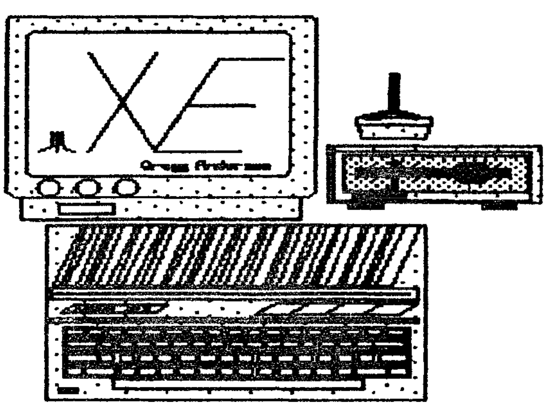
I teach 7th- and 8th-grade art in a junior high school. I assigned my 8th graders to produce a school newspaper as one project. We utilized two 130XE systems with Panasonic 1091i II printers. We used the computers to print out masters of the newspaper pages, and then ran the paper off on school copy machines. The results may not be of laser printer and professional print quality, but the output was surprisingly **good.**

The software packages I used were varied. and included professional. as well as Public Domain programs. The most utilized program I used was a word processor. Any word processor will work, providing it has the these options Formatting commands to change margins, page lengths, etc.

The ability to print double columns.

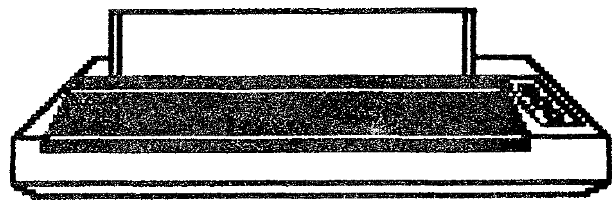
A print preview feature to view the printout before sending it to the printer (Saves lots of paper!).

The ability to print to a disk.



The word processor I use is the First X-Lent Word Processor, which has all of the above features and many more. All of the students' articles and submissions were first typed by the kids and saved to disk. I then proofread and helped the students correct their work.

The next step was to print the copy to disk. creating ASCII files which can be used by the Daisy Dot II Print processor. Daisy Dot II, a Shareware program by Roy **Goldman,** takes the **ASCII** file just created and enables you to print out your document in a wide variety of NLQ fonts. I have over 90 different NLQ fonts in almost any style to fit almost any application. I won't go into all of the features of Daisy Dot II, except to say it is worth many times the **$10** fee Mr. **Goldman** asks to register your copy.



Another program I used extensively is the Printshop from Broderbund. Printshop was used for illustrations and headlines. Some prihtouts were printed with Printshop directly to the final copy, while others were printed separately and pasted-up to **thefinal** copy with rubber cement.

We included crossword **puzzles** in our newspaper utilizing Crossword Magic from Datasoft. First, I had the students make a **wordlist** and list of clues. Students then followed **onscreen** prompts to create and print their puzzles. I had the kids cut out and paste-up their puzzles and clues onto the final copy, created with the letterhead feature of Printshop. In this way, students could title and illustrate their **puzzles** with appropriate icons **from** various Printshop Library disks.

Another type of puzzle we used in the newspaper were **WordFinds.** We used a **wordfind** program written by Matthew Ratcliff, published in the January 1984 issue of Antic. This program allows you make a **WordFind puzzle** anywhere from 10 to 30 letters square. It will then send it to a printer, and even print out a solution, which we printed in the back of the paper. We also utilized the Printshop letterhead feature to do graphics and headlines. One of the best word finds was one which included the first name of

every student in the junior high. We had to make two puzzles, and then paste them up side by side to get all of the names into a puzzle, but the results were impressive.

All in all. I was very pleased with our production. The project combined computer skills (Word Processing. Printshop, etc.) with traditional commercial art skills (Paste-Up, Freehand Cartoons and Illustrations). It was a very good educational experience, with results that the students could be very proud of.

I can't wait until next quarter. I have a new ST coming, along with a video digitizer so I can include student photos. etc. within the paper. But, as for the bulk of the work, we will still use my 130XEs, as the students are very comlortable with them. and they know how to use the software.

By the way, if you do not have Daisy Dot II, here is the address of Roy Goldman :2440 S. Jasmine, Denver, CO 80222. If you would like to order a disk packed lull of Daisy Dot 11 fonts, or disks of Public Domain Printshop fonts. please send $3 to cover duplication costs to G.L. Ray, Vice President, Tinker Atari Computer Enthusiasts, P.O. Box 668, McLoud, OK 74851.



Bit Byter News from Newsletter on Disk # 17

Translated by Horst A. Dewitz International Correspondent lor LIAUG and the Ol' Hackers.

Even so it's been only 4 weeks since we issued "Sondermagazin # 5", we still have some more news for you. Do not forget the vacation time 6/22 to 8/5/89; headquarters and library are closed, and so is the mailbox(BBS - H ADew).

MEMBERSHIP DUES

Check your mailing labels. Are you paid up? If not, please pay and avoid reminder fees.

REGIONAL MEETINGS

Regional meetings are doing better and better.

Herten had two meetings so far and now we hear that Wuppertal also had two meetings, 5/13 and 5127189 were the dates.

Wuerzburg area plans to have a meeting in the middle of July and Worms in June.

Here ate some date for future meetings:

Herten: 9/16/89 11.00 AM to 4.00 PM, Buerger Haus Sued.

Wuppertal: please call Andre 02021785837 or Roland 02021461691.

Wuerzburg: please call Alfons 0977112769 or Dieter 0936611545.

Worms: 6124189 1.00 PM restaurant "Romerpils".

Question: what about meetings in the northern part of Germany?

DATES, DATES, DATES

Atari Fair at Duesseldorf 8125 to 8/27/89

Atari Day in the Netherlands (Herzogenbusch) 9/16/89

ABBIJC e V Annual Meeting 11118189

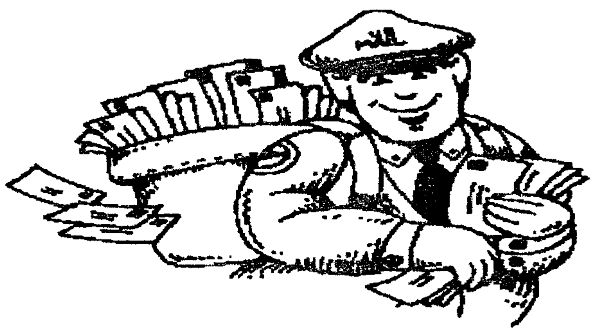
RIGHTWING RADICAL COMPUTERCLUB

Bit Byter Carsten Strotmann send us a warning about the Atari Club "The Fact". They openly advertise the exchange of pirated software; they offer far right radical games and literature. We share the opinion of Carsten that the Bit Byters should not associate with such an extremist group.

Continued on next page—

REPAIR SERVICE

Because of his work commitments. Torsten Schulz will no longer be able to do the repair service. We are looking desperately for a replacement: please let me know if someone [illegible] [illegible] clubs diagnostic and repair kit will also be transferred to the new repair service.



MAILBOX

The mailbox(BBS HADew) registered 6100 calls to date. However participation seems to slow down and we are wondering if we should implement a modified program after the vacations. We will talk about this at our next board meeting in August.

16-BIT IN OUR COMPUTERS?

Yes you read it right, according to a few US magazines this is the product: TURBO-816

In brief::

Adapter board for the XUXE

Replaces the 6502C with the 16-bit 65C816

Installation of a dual prom, guarantees that 99% of all programs will run. some old programs requiring the translator disk might have a problem.

TURBO-816 come complete with everything needed for installation. Retail about 5159.95, direct from the manufacturer $1 19.95 plus shipping.

Manufacturer is planning or working on the following:

Version for the 4001800 series,

Static memory board 32K to 256K,

Program rom board 32K to 265K,

Dynamic memory board 256K to 4MEG,

80 character video card,

Parallel floppy interface.

They are also working on the following software projects:

[illegible]

New 16-bit C,

New 16-bit Assembler and debugger,

New 16-bit screen editor.

Installation of the TURBO-816 could take one hour if the 6502C is of the plug in type. more time is needed(and more skill!) of course, if the IC is soldered. Demand in the US is such that a delivery time of up to 6 weeks is expected. For you assembly programmers here are the additional commands:

BRA BRL DEA INA COP PEA PEI PER PHB PLB PHD PLD PHX PHY PLX PLY REP SEP PHK STZ TDC TCD TRB TSB TXY TYX WAI XBA XCE

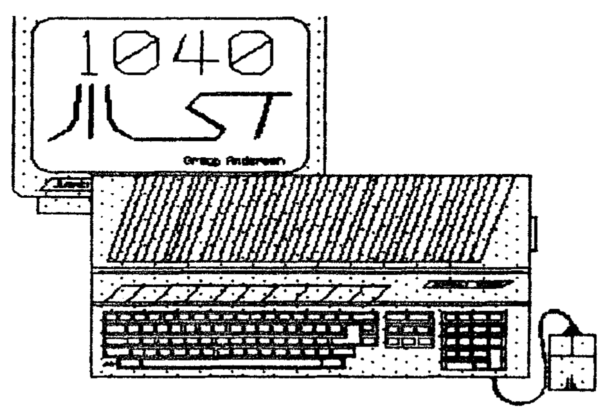
Manufacturer:

DataQue Software P.O.Box 134 Ontario, OH 44862 USA

VIDEOTEXT INTERFACE

The videotext interface arrived from the Netherlands(S.A.G.), as already mentioned in "Sondermagazin #5". However it is only a test model and needs more work, as well as the necessary software. The XUXE connection will be via joystick port (ST's use the RS232 or cartridge ports!). The video signal is being changed into ASCII characters or DEGAS-Pic's. It is our intend touse these ST features with the XL/XE's as well. Peter Sabath, Juergen Schildmann and Stephan Duesterhoff are working on the software for the XUXE.

Continued on next page......



PROGRAMMING CONTEST

Since we **improved** our LESER.BAS in this issue, we **felt** a need l a a **programming** contest lor a new LESER.BAS. The program mud **meet these requirements:**

1) It must start from Bask and return to Basic **after ending(NO** TURBO BASIC)

2) Output (to **screen** or printer) must have **automatic** word **wrap.**

3) Top **line** mud **show magazine #** and refer to **ABBUC.e.V.**

4) **Program** should **recognize** text **files** by the extension .TXT and read them into the menu.

5) Program should have **previous page(flip** page back) **capability.**

All entries should teach us by the end of August.

(ABBUC.e.V. c/o Wolfgang Burger. 45 **Wieschenbeck,** 4352 **HERTEN,** West **Germany).**

Prizes will be **awarded** for **best** entry and **consist** of original **programs.**

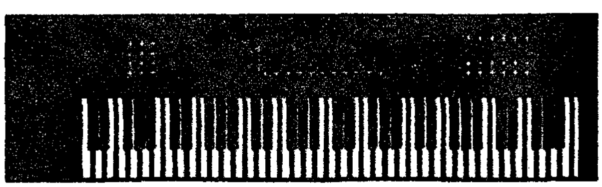
TITEL.PIC contest **is still** continuing as well as picking the **best** program from disk **#** 17. Let me hear from you; prizes are waiting for the **winners.** Take care and have a **nice summer,**

Wolfgang **Burger**

Footnote:

Wolfgang mentioned in a **recent letter** to me, that the **ANALOG** 4/89 action, that interested 50 **American Atarians** in ABBUC and which received **requested information,** not **one response** has been **received so far. Bit Byters** in Germany do read, write **and** understand **english, so** there **should** be no **reason** to communicate with them.

As always, **if** you have any questions about the Bit **Byters** or need help in translating, feel **free** to contact me at the meetings, via E-Mail **(BBS's OL Hackers, LIAUG** or NASSAU **COUNTY)or** US mail (stamped **self/addressed envelope please!).** As a **last** resort use my **phone** 516 378-0718, evenings after **8.00 PM** until **10.00 PM**



MINI MIDI LESSONS

by Morris G. Miller

12Aug89-MGM

#1a

INTRODUCTION

Almost **everyone has** a natural curiosity about **MIDI,** whether or not **there art serious** intentions **of using** it. In **this** series of mini **lessons** on **MIDI,** I will attempt **to** answer some of **the mote common** questions about it. We **will** discuss

-**What** is MIDI ?

What do I need for MIDI ?

Do I need to know **music** to use **MIDI** ?

What It a sequencer ?

What are the differences in **keyboards** ?

What does MIDI cost ?

Why should I do MIDI ?

H k almost **impossible** to discuss musk **or** MIDI without using some of the **technical** terms of the trade. In **this** series of **studies** we **will** try to say **everything** in such a way that anyone can **understand it. A** glossary will **be** presented to **help** with the words which may remain in doubt

Most of the **lessons** of this series will be **presented** on a **single** page. The **first lesson,** "What **is MIDI ?", will** finish this page and continue on the next.

WHAT IS MIDI ?

MIDI is an acronym for "Musical **Instrument** Digital **Interface".** It is a **defined** means for **interconnecting musical** instruments and other related equipment lor the **reproduction** of musk. It **now includes** your computer and the programs **for MIDI, keyboards, synthesizers** and samplers, sequencers, recorders, **editors, librarians,** scorers, and a host **of** other equipment and **functions.**

MIDI is the electrical and physical **specifications** for **these** interconnections. H forms the "standards".

The MIDI standards define the hardware connections and wiring to connect and send signals between the instruments, such that one can control or inform the other of **musical**

Continued on next page.....

events. The send wire of one connects to the receive of the other, and vita-versa. Signals are sent in serial, much like the serial printer or modem connection on your computer; one wire to send, one wire to receive. On some computers the MIDI interface plugs into the serial modem port of the computer. On others the MIDI port is built in as a separate interface.

WHAT IS MIDI ?

The serial pulses sent between instruments are organized into 8-bit codes. The MIDI standard defines the meanings of these codes so that all instruments speak the same code language. Not all the instruments respond to all the coder defined, but those that respond to any one code all respond in the same manner.

Electronically, MIDI also defines the current and voltage limits of the pulses and the bit rate for the pulses. In this there are now two standards, but any instrument designed for the faster standard, will respond properly to the original, slower, standard unless it specifically so states.Not to worry. For what you and I are doing, either of these are sufficient.

The MIDI connections on your instruments are a 5-pin DIN. There are three kinds

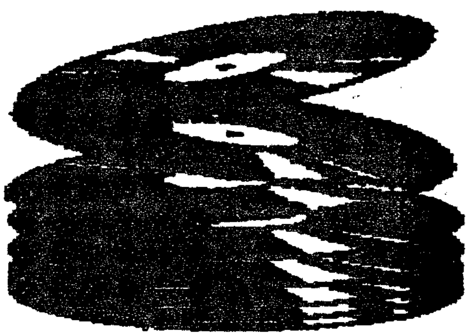
MIDI IN - the instrument can receive MIDI code.

MIDI OUT - the instrument can send MIDI code.

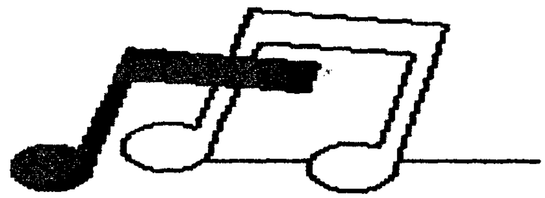
MIDI THRU - the instrument can repeat to the next instrument what was received on MIDI IN.

Not all instruments will have all three ports. This is a clue to how that instrument can fit into the MIDI hookup.

The full definitions for midi codes ate available from many sources and will not be repeated here. Codes are defined for turning each note on and off. the note attack (how hard the key is struck),touch pressure (how hard the key is held down), release [how quickly the key is released), patch changes (selecting the voice to play), pedal control (sustain. soft, etc.), glissando and portamento (glide between notes), modulation (vibrato or tremolo), and others.



Codes are also defined for the individual manufacturers, called exclusive codes. This allows each manufacturer to have special codes for the control of functions on a keyboard that is different from all other keyboards. It is this "feature" that will prompt you to make some decisions about the type of keyboard to use and the programs to buy before sinking a lot of money into it. The two must work together.



Note that MIDI dots NOT SEND THE SOUND of the notes played. MIDI sends signals to indicate what the PERFORMER DID. MIDI sends codes to indicate which key(s) was pressed, when it was pressed, when it was released, which control war operated and how much it war operated. When played back from the computer the keys ate pressed again exactly the same as before. and the same controls are operated again exactly the same way. Reminiscent of a player piano, no ? Only it doesn't have to be apiano. It might be two horns and a banjo. That's neeeet !

Phantasm

by Bob Retelle (MACE,WAUG)

Wandering around the MACE Expo with my "Gold Card" looking for bargains, I decided to try one of the games being displayed by Scorpion/MicroDaft. There was quite a variety of games, and with the show specials and special discounts, many were priced less than $15 each Among their offerings was one called PHANTASM, from Exocet Software. which looked interesting. The name. and the typically "European" package act (featuring natutally. a Boris Vallejo style. half-naked woman) has nothing at all to do with the game itself. Likewise, the extremely brief scenario on the single sheet of documentation has little connection to what you'll see on the screen. Actually. the game stands on its own quite well without these "marketing tools."

PHANTASM is essentially a "combat flight simulator" arcade game. The graphics ate very well done, in a "filled



3-D shapes" style very similar to STARGLIDER II. The game is acceptably fast, even with these complex shapes, with only a little bit of slowdown when the screen displays many large, filled polygons. One really nice touch is the "point source" lighting effect, which simulates sunlight, and creates realistically shadowed objects. When facing into the "sun", everything is silhouetted — almost like driving into a sunset.

Travelling over the surface of the planet, you pass from the well lit "day" side, to the dark and shadowy "night" side, as you pursue your elusive goal.

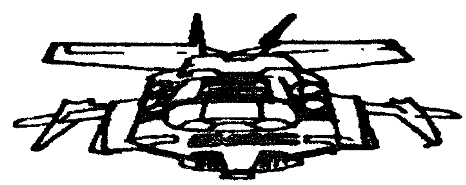
The object of PHANTASM, other than shooting almost everything in sight, is to eventually eliminate the eight bases which are spewing out all kinds of nasty enemy thingies, and transport back to your own planet. Your Phoenix fighter-interceptor is armed with both lasers and guided missiles, although the lasers have a nasty habit of overheating and refusing to work until they cool down again (the aliens need SOME kind of advantage after all). By judiciously firing the lasers in short bursts, you can avoid the embarrassment of having them stop working just as ANOTHER alien ship pops up from behind a small mountain range. Your ship can carry only nine missiles at a time, but there are arms dumps scattered here and there which will rearm and repair it.

An Anti-Missile Beam will destroy incoming enemy missiles (as long as it lasts). and Boosters will help you run away from groups of aliens that are just too large to handle all at once

One facet of games, of which I am usually very critical, is the control of your ship. Happily, the controls in PHAN-TASH are very good. The joystick is quick and responsive in steering the ship and controlling the speed. Height is controlled by keys on the keyboard, and really comes into play only occasionally during the game. Because of this, the game is much more like a tank simulation than an aircraft simulator, despite the futuristically rendered fighter craft on the instruction sheet.

Unfortunately. the one area in which PHANTASH is sorely lacking is its documentation. The one. lonely, little card in the packaging gives the basics of which keys do what, and an overview of what the indicators on the screen mean, but very little else. Even those details are often incorrect, as I discovered when I began to wonder what the random seeming dots all over the main screen were. After playing a bit, it became apparent that they are a "heads up" radar display that wasn't even mentioned on the instruction card at all!

What helps to save the situation is that the lowest difficulty level is essentially a "Training Mission" level. In this level objects which come into range of your lasers are identified in a screen on your instrument panel, giving some clue as to what to do with them. Your ship is very hard to destroy in this level, but you aren't given any score. Three other levels increase the difficulty and point values for enemy objects destroyed, although there is never any indication of how many points each individual object is worth. There are enemy spaceships and tank and radar towers and fortresses to shoot, fuel dumps and arms supplies to dock with, and of course, the 8 "re-constitutions" to destroy.



There is a screen showing the entire planet, which allows you to choose your area of conflict, but it appears to me that the game is created randomly every time you play, thus rendering this screen effectively useless. About the only control you have is whether you start the game on the light or dark side of the planet. The planet is divided up into 64 sections, and each section takes an appreciable amount of time to explore, so a complete game could take a great deal of time. Unfortunately, there is no "Save Game" option, so you must play all the way through in one sitting, or restart from scratch each time.

Continued on next page......

Played fast and furiously. or slowly and cautiously. PHANTASM is a nice blend of graphics, playability and value. It combines fast action with strategy, and is **definately recommended!**

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ANNOUNCING

☆ 8bit Public Domain Disks

• PD 140 _____ Super Utilities #1

Disk includes "NUM", a m/l file that provides the basic user with automatic generation of line numbers: "MICROASM", USR routines and assembler: "PATTERN", displays a moving low resolution pattern on the screen: "ASM", a disk oriented symbolic assembler written in Basic: "COLOR", displays all 128 colors on the screen at one time: "DOC", a disk **documenter: "PRINTNOP",** assembler source code for a printer driver which utilizes the **Atari's** controller jacks 3 & 4

• PD 146 __________ Mach DOS

A unique **"pop-up"** window-type **dos** menu. Auto switching of densities between single and double. Default drive settings. Fast sector copying. Multiple file copying. **Write Verify on/off.** DOS *20125* compatible. **On** the **XI/XE** This **DOS** automatically switches Basic off when typing DOS to give you more **RAM** and switches Basic back on **when you select (B) to run cartridges. Includes docs on disk.**

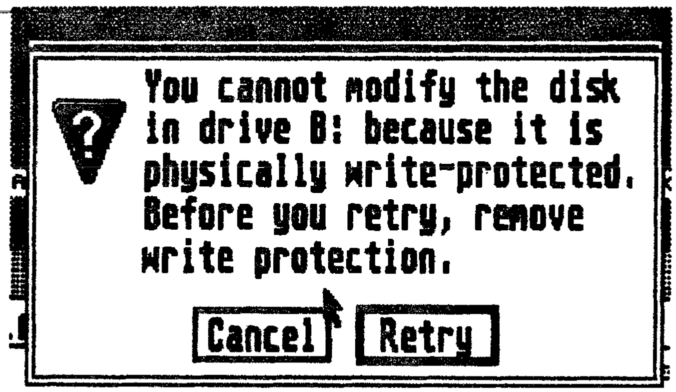
PD 129..................................**Utilities #2**

"REPAIR STATION". makes **basic-saved unlistable** programs **listable.** "SCRUNCH", **bootload** to **DOS** file **conversion program. "UNSCRUNCH", DOS file to bootload** conversion program. **"BOOTUP",** a program that will automatically **boot dup.sys** when booted **from** Basic, and **for** those who **don't** have DOS *2 5* yet. it is included with the **DOS** *2 5* utilities. ramdisk.com. **setup.com,** copy32.com and diskfix.com

The Unintentional, Unexpected, Unwelcome, Uncontrollable Xbios-virus

by **Dorothy** Brumleve

Recently, I've written several children's programs in GFA **Basic** in which data files can be saved to and loaded from disk. These programs use no form of file selector **box** – the program knows what the file names **are/will** be. and simply clicking a LOAD or SAVE **box** on the screen initiates the procedure. I've done very little error-trapping in my **programs,** but since multiple disk accesses add considerably to the potential for user error. I decided I would install some "traps" in my latest program. Without such traps. my young users are presented with a GEM **alert box.** proclaiming in decidedly adult language that they must "Remove the Write-Protection" for example. I would rather that my **users** never **see** such a message.



It so happened that my husband, Tim, had written a MIDI-related program in which errors were handled gracefully. Tim's code checked for errors while saving a file. such as write-protection. an improperly formatted disk. and no disk in the drive. using an Xbios call as follows

A%=Xbios(9,L:Buffer_address%,L:1,Device%,Sector%, Track%. Side% Num%)

He attempted to write to a nonexistent sector. If the disk was good. the result of the call should **be** "-8" which means **the sector wasn't found. To check for an improperly** formatted disk or no disk in the drive when loading. the **critical call was another Xbios command:**

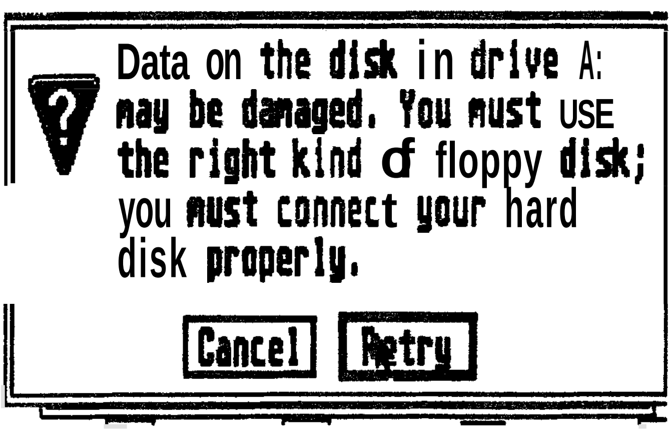
A%=Xbios(8,L:Buffer_address%,L:1,Device%,Sector%, Track%,Side%, Num%)

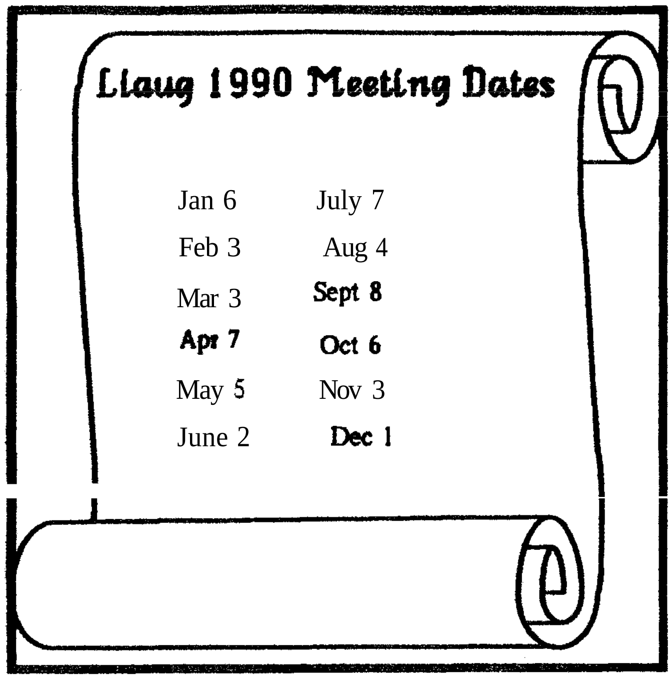
Now, almost all the books discussing **system-level** commands such as **Xbios** include a little warning to the effect that **you'll be** sorry if you use this command. And I was sorry.

I made a copy of **Tim's listing** and **proceeded** to **transfer the** relevant code to my own program. I added cute **little alert** boxes to announce each error; in **these**, a declining scale was played **while** an **informative message** was displayed and the word **"Argh!"** was written five times down the screen. All seemed to go well at first. In **testing** my program, if I tried to SAVE to a **write-protected** disk, sure enough, my **cute little** alert **box** appeared **("Maybe** you need to close the **little** hole in the corner of the disk. **Argh!..")** **and** then the **program** would resume. If I tried to SAVE or LOAD **when** no **disk** was in the drive or **the** disk was **inappropriately** formatted, again my alert **box** appeared **("Oops! Do** you have a disk in the drive? **Argh!...")** and the program would resume. And if I tried to load from a disk thatdidn't have the **file** the computer was looking for. my alert **box** announced the error, and the program would resume.

Yes, the program would resume, and it resumed to do evil works. If I attempted to load from a disk that did not have the sought-after file, the computer would never bother to read the disk directory of a **subsequent** disk!

And it would do bad things to the subsequent disk, and the disk after that. and the disk **after** that. It would simply announce that the **file** was not found – even if I knew the file was on the disk in the drivel After the first few tests of my new code. I came down to the desktop to take a **good** look. **Sure** enough, none of the disks had the expected **file!** But I was sure I had saved it on every one of those **disks!** What was happening? Obviously. my program was deleting the file.





Back to coding, I changed some things around and ran some more **tests.** When I returned to the desktop this time. a very **big surprise was wa**iting. It seems that the directory of one **of my test disks had been supplanted** by the directory of **another**, but the files themselves remained intact (they were simply renamed). **For** example. if I ran **"GFABASIC.PRG"** on this disk, I wound **up** looking at a previously-compiled **version** of my own program, not at the GFA Editor screen. No, my program wasn't **really** deleting files, it was rearranging the directories on my disks. Some of the disks involved in this first test were important ones. This explains why I no longer have a single copy of any version of this program **written** before I put in the Xbios commands.

Ten disks later, I thought I had the problem licked. Normally. the If **Exist(Filename$)** command will cause the computer to look at the directory and see if the filename is present. but somehow the Xbios commands were interfering with the function of my subsequent If Exist. If I forced the computer to read a directory by using the Files or the **Dir** commands, the error-trapping seemed to work. Unfortunately. both Files and Dir cause the directory to **be** displayed on the screen. something I did not want to happen in my program. I finally discovered that I could cause the computer to Open. Close. and Kill a new file. and after that. it would read the disk. The error-trapping was then successful; I could load from a new disk even if the previous load from another disk had been unsuccessful. However. the kinky directory-swappingloverwritingldeletingdidn't end. Error-trapping at the expense of disk directories isn't worth it.

I gave up in disgust and told Tim about my miserable state of frustration. What? Hadn't I looked at his code? he wondered. He scoffed: I must have made serious mistakes in the transfer between his program and mine, and he spent virtually all of the next twenty-four hours failing to prove it.

The main problem. as I saw it, was this: when you are presented with a file selector box. you can force the computer to read thedisk by clicking in the upper margin of the box frame or on the "X" in the upper left-hand corner. I needed some way to convince the computer to simulate that action even without the benefit of a file selector box. Tim did his coding on the computer I usually use for programming. so while it was busy, I went downstairs to my communications computer and shot off a rambling and incoherent letter. including my code, to my friend Dr. John B. Holder of Marathon Computer Press. John has been into computing since he was a small child. and I figured, if John doesn't know how to do it. then no one does.

Turns out, no one does, at least not with GFA Basic. I had tried, Tim had tried, and now John had tried. and the program still didn't work. And so I took out the Xbios commands, the enor-trapping. the cute little alert boxes with a declining scale and "Argh!" written five times down the screen. My latest program has no more error-trapping than the first. and my little users still have to deal with a GEM alert box if they try to save to a write-protected disk.

The episode was not without some positive features I am positive. for example. that I will not copy any Xbios command out of someone else's program without extreme caution. I am positive that I will heed the little warnings in programming manuals. And I am positive I'll never experiment with the Xbios command using a disk unless I'm ready to reformat it anyway.

D.A. Brumleve. M.A., is involved with children and computers in a variety of ways. The mother of five children. ages 2 to 10. she serves as the adult facilitator of the Children's ST Users Group in Urbana. IL. An avid programmer. she has developed a beginners' course in GFA Basic and is the author of PreSchool KidProgs (MichTron) and numerous freely-distributed programs for young ST users.

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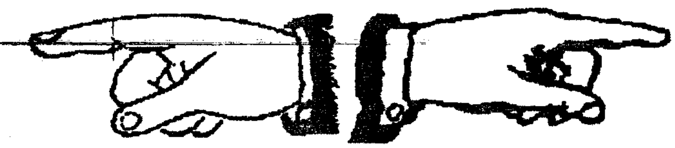
GFA Artist

Program by Dirk Van Assche and Danny Van Agtmael

$79.95

Copyright 1988 by Donavan Vicha

I've struggled with this animationldrawing program for close to three months so when the upgrade board on my new (pre-owned) 520ST went south. I took it as a sign that it's time to get this review written for better or worse. GFA Artist is another import from Germany that seems to typify the German' attitude toward GEM: avoid at all cost. The cod. however. in this country, is that users are left with a nonstandard interface for the program. Add to this their typical inadequate documentation due to translation difficulties and a glossary approach to describing functions and no tutorials concerning animation, and you have a program with a long. difficult learning curve.



This is really too bad, because GFA Artist contains some truly unique and unusual features that make it awfully appealing for creating animations. Although it requires a full one-Meg/color setup to run, you can create animations of up to 2000 frames. The 1500-frame demo runs nearly four minutes, so quite a lot can be done on the Megas if all is compatible. If you've got the time (or the understanding of computer animation from using other programs/computers) for trial-and-error learning. this is a program to investigate.

I would also like to comment that the name of the program is misleading. The description on the box would lead you to believe that this program is similar to Spectrum and Quantum Paintbox. which are strictly paint programs that



allow you to use many more colors than the ST was set up to provide. The 1024 colors that you can use with GFA Artist are available in a cycling mode that can be used to rework D.E.G.A.S. and NeoChrome art files, but cannot be used

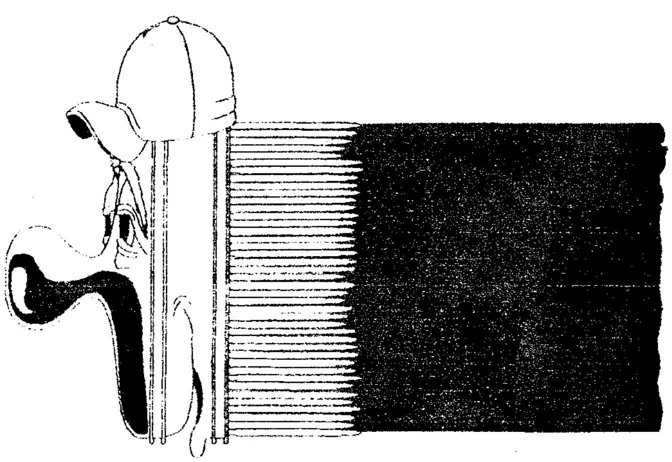
outside of the main program — there is no slide program for viewing your multi-color creations. While you can create NeoChrome and D.E.G.A.S. formatted files, the main features of this program emphasize animation. A more appropriate name would have been "GFA Animator" rather than "GFA Artist."

Awkward Interface and Inadequate Docs:

If this program had appeared for the Macintosh, it would have been condemned and left to collec? dust on dealers' shelves. The ST community appears to be quite a bit more tolerant of programmers who don't bother following GEM protocols than Mac users who demand that all of their programs follow the same rules for using menus, dialog boxes and such. There are quite a few ST programs that depart from the "standard" GEM protocols and several of those are very powerful and highly acclaimed programs(PageStream, WordPerfect and D.E.G.A.S. Elite come immediately to mind). So there is hope for this program. I suppose.

GFA Artist opens to a screen with familiar rows of function boxes (icons)that give access to nearly 60 functions. Although the icons are not all familiar, this looks at first glance to be something that can be worked out rather painlessly. Rut then using the icons proves not to be as straightforward as they first appear. To choose an icon. you must hold down the left mouse button (LMB) and slide through the three rows to the function you want. The icons are highlighted in this manner: it takes a click of the right mouse button (RMB) to activate your choice.

Now all this can be worked out eventually, but each time you've completed an action, you're returned to the icons. If you want to draw several boxes. circles or lines, you have to rechoose the icon after each item is drawn.



Further complications to this process enter in when you decide to change the color of the tool you've chosen. To my mind, this arrangement is downright annoying and makes me resist wanting to get used to its interface.

A different set of commands is accessed for creating films. Both sets of commands can be brought forth using the F1 and F2 keys. The F1 functions are definitely more difficult to grasp due to the way in which this program handles putting together its animation sequences. The docs do a better job of covering this area, but are still incomplete in bringing about understanding to the novice user. More on the F1 commands later.

As mentioned already, the annoyance factor is heightened by the glossary format of the documentation. Each function is described adequately in a listing that follows the order of the icons as they appear in each row. There is an index, so you can look them up easily enough, but there is nothing written here that ties the functions together into something a novice user can understand. While there are appendices concerning creating a film, merging films and using the run-only interpreter (allowing you to distribute your animations without the main program), these are very mechanical descriptions that give little understanding of the program's animation functions.



Here's an example of the vague nature of the docs: A GEM bit-blit function may be required because "in some cases it may be necessary for certain functions to operate at the highest possible speed." Which "certain" functions are they referring to here? The docs go on to state that "in general, we advise nor to activate the GEM routine." Wouldn't it have been simpler and less mysterious to either state which functions really require this option or drop it, building the bit-blit routine into the functions that require it?

Finally, there is the unusual nature of this program's setup. *You* must boo! this program without any accessories or othermemory-resident programs -- it uses all the bytes your system can spare. It is run in medium resolution, but only produces low resolution files. To quit the program, you must power down your system in order to ensure that the memory is completely cleared. GFA Artist definitely takes liberties with TOS and GEM end must run on its own. One wonders if it will be able to run at all when the new ROMs become available fot all STs.

Exceptional 3D Effects and Other Drawing Features:

If you plow through the program and play with its drawing commands, you quickly realize that whatever mistakes have been incurred with the interface and docs. the drawing capabilities arc powerful and complete. Along with the usual drawing tools like lines, sprays. boxes, cllipscs. cut/copylpastc, fills, arcs and such, there are some unusual features that stand out from anything offered by other paint programs. Just about anything you can create with GFA Artist can be used as a paintbrush for maximum effect. Horizontal and vertical flips can be accomplished along with a combined flip, each with its own icon. Part of your picture can bc bent vertically or horizontally to good effect as well. You can draw the shape of the bend or choose preset amplitudes of 1/2 Sinus, 1 Sinus or 2 Sinus (and are these terms correct? Sine?).



For more precise copy/cut functions, you can choosc to "lasso" parts of your picture rather than the usual boxed rubberband function. You can afso capture a par: of your screen to create globes, or vertical or horizontal parallelograms. You can rotate a captured part of your screen as well as create an animated rotation effect. If your shape is round or box-like. you can specify a number of sprites and create a zoom effect going from small to large or latge to small -- the number of sprites determines the number of stages in the overall smoothness of the transition.

The really impressive effects generated by this program follow a similar path. When initiating the animated vcrsior! of the following functions, you choose the number of sprites to be used (5-15 sprites seems to work well). You then outline the image to be transformed and then it can become a vertical or horizontal drum (cylinder shaped) or its perspective can be enhanced vertically or horizontally for a simple 3D effect, as an animated scquencc. Thcsc effects can also be created in static, non-animated form. With a little trial and error, these are marvelous effects that can bc instituted quickly and easily.

The drum effect turns your captured image into a cylinder-shaped object that you can size simply by moving the mouse, causing a wire-framed image of a cylinder to rotate and grow/shrink. If you're in the animated version, you also choose the placements around the drum where the sprites will occur -- the more spritcs used. !hc more detailed your "spin" will be.

I car: envision how this drum can bc rotated and stretched out across the bottom of the screen to create a moving roadway or a star map rolling over and over under the sprite of a spaceship. It's a terrific effcct.

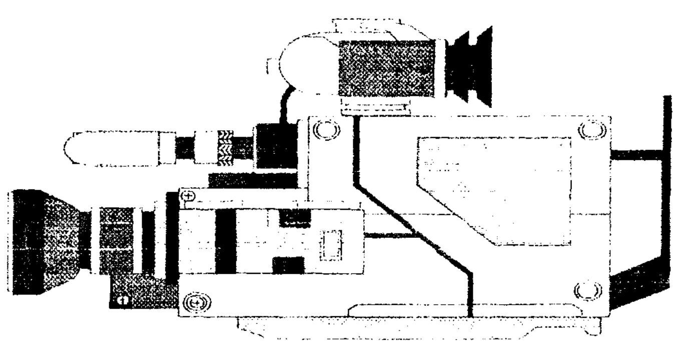
Other Features:

The two single-sided disks that come with this package include two proprietary fonts and a font editor program, the run-only interpreter that allows you to run your films independent of the main program. demo files for a demo film and a 1000-color demo screen. Also included is a film merger program that allows you to splice together parts of a film that is otherwise too big to run on a single-Mcg ST.

The usual disk management commands can bc acccsscd within the program to rename or copy files and format disks. NeoChrome color cycling is supported, and all popular color paint program formats arc automatically loaded into GFA Artist for use as background screens for your film. Any resolution conversions needed to make the picture compatible with the GFA Artist format arc automatically performed during the loading process.

You can use up to four different workscreens and easily move from one to another with one of the icon commands.

The F1 box commands are used to put your film together. These allow you to define a sequence of frames to be used, as well as other film editor functions for inserting, moving, copying and deleting frames from a sequence. You can load in up to four background pictures for use with your film. You can group sprites together to define their relationship as a single sprite. making them easier to handle in creating your film. You can call up sprites you've already created and saved and set up their sequences of movement. And you can take full coctrol of cach frame, creating layers for the various components of your file (e.g., background as layer 3, a tree in foreground layer 1 and a body walking between them as layer 2), setting start and finish framcs and setting speeds. The default is 10 layers, so there is ample room for sprites to move around each other.

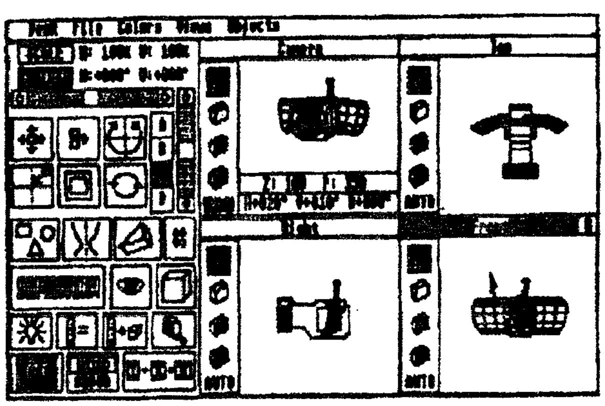


These functions are the real guts of the animation side of the program, and they seem very complete. Since you arr going to have to do a lot of trial and error just to see what kinds of effects can be created. I am happy to report the awkward interface is less of a problem with !hc F1 functions than with the 60 F2 icon set. But the docs really leave you out in the cold here. Instead of such a vast amount of trial and error in figuring out special effects and film editing shortcuts. the docs should provide tutorials or checklists for achieving them.

Conclusion:

I am not familiar with the Cyber Studio array of ptograms that are purportedly the state-of-the-art in animation softwarc for the ST, nor with other animation programs like Aegis Animator or Michl'ron's Make It Move. I car, make no comparisons as to ease-of-use factors among these ptograms and GFA Artist. I have seen animation films created with all of these programs, however, and the demo for GFA Artist is completely blown away by what I've seen done with Cyber Studio and Animator. A lot of the effects that GFA Artist provides were not really used in the demo that comes with the package, so it may not be completely fair to write it off on this basis. I have not seen any other demos for GFA Artist, however, so there's nothing to show the real potential of this program.

I have to call this review a toss-up as far as any recommendations go. Computer animation is a complex process and requires detailed documentation that really communicates to the user. and the docs here fall short. The interface for using the splendid features of GFA Artist can be very annoying even when you get used to it. The wide range of colors provided by the program are of very limited utility, so this program fails as a paint program in spite of many unique drawing tools. In sum, GFA Artist is a disappointment.



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Closing by the editor

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for a
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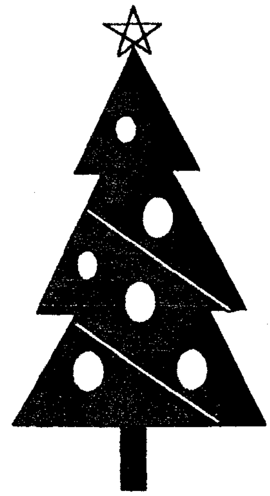
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